

# Choosing a School for Your Deaf or Hard of Hearing Child

## What is a school for the deaf?

- A school for the deaf provides small classes, taught by a teacher of the deaf
- There are mostly deaf children in the school. A small number of children may be not be deaf, but need Auslan as they cannot communicate through speech
- Children may receive audiological services by Australian Hearing at the school
- The children follow the usual school curriculum
- The school will provide events such as camps, sports, and other activities outside the classroom
- They may or may not sit for nation-wide testing

## What is a primary school deaf facility/unit or unit?

- A deaf facility/unit operates within a mainstream school
- A deaf facility/unit has its own rooms within the school. The number of rooms it has depends on the facility/unit number of students to accommodate
- A primary school deaf facility/unit will be staffed by teachers of the deaf. Auslan interpreters may be employed, depending on individual student needs
- Deaf students usually attend the majority of the day in the same classroom as their hearing peers. The teacher of the deaf will provide assistance and/or signing support as necessary or Auslan interpreters will interpret
- The amount of time each deaf student spends in the classroom with their peers depends on each individual deaf student
- Most deaf students, depending on their needs, will spend part of each day or week being taught individually or within a small group of other deaf students in the deaf facility/unit/unit. The teacher of the deaf will provide

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language enrichment activities, tutorial support for class subjects or other activities which are needed

- Deaf students are part of the mainstream school and attend all activities provided to children who are not deaf, including sports, camps and other events
- Some students will receive audiological services by Australian Hearing who usually visit the school
- The Facility/Unit Co-ordinator usually reports directly to the School Principal
- Facilities/Units may provide all communication methods, or they may only cater for students who communicate through speaking.

### **What is a secondary school deaf facility/unit?**

A secondary school deaf facility/unit is the same as a primary school deaf facility/unit with the exception that:

- A secondary school deaf facility/unit will be staffed by teachers of the deaf and Auslan interpreters. Interpreters are preferably qualified in interpreting.
- Teachers of the deaf will also sign for the deaf student in the class when an interpreter is not available or attend a class if a deaf student requires more assistance from a teacher of the deaf
- All government secondary school facilities/units cater for both students who sign and those who are oral.
- Some Independent school deaf facilities/units only cater for students who are oral.

### **What educational support is available in mainstream schools that do not have a deaf facility/unit?**

Deaf students in government mainstream schools usually have access to educational support services. Deaf students with lesser hearing losses may still be eligible for Visiting or Itinerant Teacher of the Deaf support.

The educational support offered depends on the student's needs and the support available within the school or from the Region. Check with the school to see what support is available if the school is an Independent or Catholic school. Support services which may be offered in government schools include:

- A integration co-ordinator who co-ordinates all services provided to students with disabilities within the school
- Integration aides
- A visiting or itinerant teacher of the deaf

The student will attend all mainstream classes. They may be withdrawn for extra tuition provided by the integration co-ordinator or the visiting or itinerant teacher of the deaf.

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A visiting or itinerant teacher of the deaf may visit the school, but frequency, duration and type of visit will vary according to the needs of the individual deaf student and the resources available to the visiting or itinerant teacher.

## What should you look for in a school?

The most important thing you need to consider is to find out if the school will be able to meet your child's needs.

You can take note of the friendliness of the staff and their attitude towards your child. How you feel when you walk into the school is important. Is the atmosphere warm and welcoming? Can you see that all students are valued in the school? If the school has a deaf facility/unit or an integration unit, is it well looked after?

Try not to judge a school on its buildings. Some schools are housed in older buildings but the program provided and support to the students is excellent. Try and look beyond the school's image to the actual program provided to the students.

Below are some possible questions to ask. You may need to ask other questions which are relevant to your situation and which are of most interest to you. You may not need to ask all the questions below.

### All schools

- What is the school's policy on developing reading, writing and maths?
- What is the school's policy on parent involvement?
- Does the school have regular Student Support Meetings? How are parents involved? Are minutes taken and shared among members?
- How many children are in the school?
- How many children are on the Disability Support Program?
- How often do parents receive written reports or other information about their children's progress?
- How often can families meet with their child's teacher?
- What is the school's policy on bullying?

### Communication for deaf students

- What is the school's policy on communication with deaf students?
- Are all teachers of the deaf qualified in deaf education?
- How skilled are teachers in making small repairs and changes to my child's technical equipment?

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### **Sign Specific Needs**

- How fluent are teachers of the deaf in sign language? How many teachers of the deaf in the facility/unit can sign? How well can they understand what the students are signing?
- Is training in sign language offered to parents? If so, how often?

### **Auditory Verbal Specific**

- Are teachers skilled and experienced in oral education for deaf students?
- What speech pathology support will be offered to my child? How often will the speech pathologist work with my child?
- What follow up work for speech pathology will I need to do at home?

### **Deaf Facilities or Units (also see questions for mainstream schools)**

- How many students are enrolled in the deaf facility/unit?
- How many teachers of the deaf work in the facility/unit and are they qualified as teachers of the deaf?
- How do they keep their skills up-to-date?
- What is the facilities policy on communication modes?
- How many of the students are oral?
- How many of the students use sign language?
- How many interpreters work in the facility/unit and are they qualified?
- If my child uses a different communication mode to what is offered in the facility/unit, can my child be enrolled? How will the facility/unit meet my child's needs?
- How many hours per week will my child work in the deaf facility/unit? How is this decided?
- What work will be undertaken with my child in the deaf facility/unit?
- How many deaf students will be in my child's group in the deaf facility/unit?
- Will my child receive individual support and help in the deaf facility/unit or will work focus on 'group' needs?
- Will my child be asked how they would like to be supported?
- Who will work with my child in the deaf facility/unit?
- How will my child's reading, writing, maths and language skills be evaluated? Who will do the evaluation? How will it be reported to me?
- How many hours a week will my child work on the mainstream classroom with their peers? How is this decided?

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- What support will my child receive in the mainstream classroom? How is this decided? Will my child have to share the support person with other students?
- Who will support my child in the mainstream classroom? How is this decided? What skills do they have?
- How many hours per day will my child receive support in the mainstream classroom?
- Does the deaf facility/unit have special excursions, camps or sporting events with other deaf facilities/units?
- Is a Deaf Studies curriculum taught in the deaf facility/unit?
- Are there deaf role models for my child available?
- Is there any transport provision for my child to get to and from the school?
- What are the results of previous deaf students leaving the facility/unit to move onto secondary school or tertiary study?
- What are the outcomes of previous students who have graduated from the deaf facility/unit? What have they done after they have left school?
- How does the deaf facility/unit promote independence in deaf students?

## Mainstream Schools

- Do staff receive deaf awareness training? How often is this provided? Who provides it?
- What deaf awareness training do the other students receive?
- What training will the staff have on the specific needs of my child?
- Will my child have support in the yard?
- Will staff supervising students in the yard be able to communicate with my child?
- How is bullying monitored and dealt with?
- How many students will be in the same classroom as my child?
- Are there any other deaf students in the school? How old are they?
- Will there be any deaf role models for my child?
- Will my child have any opportunity to meet other deaf students who don't attend this school?
- Have any classrooms been adapted for deaf students to reduce echoing and background noise?
- Are their carpets and curtains in the classrooms?
- How good is the lighting in the classrooms?
- Are there any classrooms fitted with a soundfield system or interactive smartboard?

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## Integration Aides

- What qualifications do integration aides have?
- What experience have they had in working with deaf students?
- Have they had any training related specifically to deaf students?
- Who supports the integration aides?
- Is the integration aide expected to plan lessons for my child?
- Does the integration aide work one-to-one with my child?
- How many integration aides are there in the school?

## Reading and Writing

- How is reading and writing taught in the school?
- What support is available for my child to assist them in these areas?
- What resources are available to assist my child?
- How will my child be monitored in reading and writing?
- How will their skills be assessed? How often? Who will assess my child?
- Will my child be able to sit any nation-wide testing of reading and writing skills?
- How are parents informed of progress in reading and writing?
- Are parents assisted to develop skills in helping their child with reading and writing?

## Other activities

- What sports or musical events can my child be involved in at school?
- Does the school have excursions, camps? How will my deaf child be included and supported?
- How will my child be hear school assemblies?
- Does the school have after school activities? How can my child be included?

## Technology

- Does Australian Hearing visit the school?
- Do teachers check hearing aids and cochlear implants each day?
- Do all students wear FM devices if they benefit from them?
- Are teachers skilled in monitoring and undertaking small repairs to hearing aids and cochlear implants?
- Are spare hearing aids available if my child's is broken? Are spare parts for my child's cochlear implant available?
- Does the school have a teletext TV to display captions on TV programs?

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- Does the school have a DVD player? How aware is the school of the need to provide captioned videos and DVDs?
- How will my child hear announcements over the Public Address System?
- Does the school have any visual fire alarms?

## Visiting or Itinerant Teachers of the Deaf

- Is there a visiting/itinerant teacher of the deaf available to visit my child?
- Can the teacher of the deaf meet the communication needs of my child?
- Are they qualified teachers of the deaf?
- How often do they update their skills?
- How will they work with my child? How often?
- Will they establish goals for my child and involve families in the establishment of these goals?
- How will they work with the school?
- Will they provide deafness awareness training for other teachers and students?
- How will the visiting/itinerant teacher of the deaf communicate with me?
- Is the visiting/itinerant teacher available to support me in any questions I have about my child's progress?

## Parental Involvement

- Are parents welcome to observe the students in the classroom?
- How are parents involved in the Student Support Group meetings?
- Is there a parent support group for parents?
- How does the school communicate with parents?

## If you are a deaf parent and use an interpreter

Will the school provide an interpreter for:

- Parent/teacher interviews?
- Student Support Group meetings?
- School concerts or musical/drama events?
- Christmas concerts?
- Awards nights?

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